

DECISION MEMORANDUM on ACTION AND APPLICATION OF:

Categorical Exclusion 516 DM2, Appendix 1, 1.12

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument – Kane County, Utah

Project Name: Buckskin Mountain Fuels Reduction
BLM Office: Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
County: Kane County, Utah

CX Log #: UT-030-05-004-CX

Project Location: See attached maps

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project area is located on the Buckskin Mountain in southeastern Kane County, Utah (see Attachment #2: Map of Project Area). The Proposed Action would utilize the following treatment techniques to reduce hazardous fuels on approx. 982 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-administered public lands (see Attachment #3: Project Treatment Unit Map).

Treatment	Treatment Technique	Acres
A	Thinning to SDI 105	350
B	Thinning to SDI 63	321
C	Thinning to SDI 24	311
	Total =	982

Up to ninety percent of standing pinyon and juniper would be removed in the areas shown on Attachment #3, creating a mosaic pattern of treated and untreated vegetation. Thinning of pinyon-juniper stands to relieve competitive stress will promote increased vigor and health on residual trees. This will reduce the susceptibility of trees in the thinned areas to insect caused mortality. It will open the canopy and thus help to retain native understory species, thus enhancing wildlife habitat; thinning will not be heavy enough to substantially reduce wildlife thermal and hiding cover. Thinning will help promote natural regeneration of tree, shrub, and other understory species. Removal of live and dead material >3" diameter will reduce fuel loadings and thereby reduce the likelihood of large-scale, high-temperature wildfire that could be damaging to power transmission lines, soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat, and could potentially increase the risk of noxious weed invasion. Removal of green pinyon material >3" diameter will be done in a timely manner to reduce the chance of build-up of pinyon *Ips* beetle. Material removed will be available for fuelwood and post & pole products.

Areas cleared of trees found to be lacking in understory vegetation would be seeded with a mix of native shrubs, forbs, and grasses. Selection of seeded species would be coordinated with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. Areas seeded would be rested from grazing for a minimum of two full years in order to allow the seedlings to become established and set seed. This rest period may be extended if monitoring shows the seeding has not sufficiently established. Once seeding establishment has been confirmed, the BLM may authorize grazing according to Utah BLM's *Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management*. The proposed treatments would be conducted according to BLM standards (See Attachment #1: Treatment Specifications) and achieve the above identified objectives within the project area. Archeological, Paleontological, and Special Status Species clearances would be completed prior to ground disturbing activities. If located, Special Status Species, Paleontological, and Cultural sites would be protected according to BLM policy and guidelines. Monitoring by BLM personnel and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources would be conducted on a recurring basis and recommendations developed to maintain vegetation condition and fuel loading at acceptable levels. Maintenance actions could include future removal of pinyon and juniper, seeding and tubling planting in the project area. No hazardous materials would be used in conjunction with this project.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED

The primary purpose of this project is to reduce standing fuel levels associated with dense woodland stands; reduce threats of wildfire to a major power corridor and critical mule deer winter range. Secondary goals of the project are to encourage and increase the density, diversity, and health and vigor of understory shrubs, forbs and grasses. Of special interest is the protection and enhancement of the shrub component for wildlife browse. The removal of standing pinyon and juniper is designed to decrease the hazardous fuel loading, thereby lessening the likelihood that large-scale, high-temperature wildfire(s) would occur (See Map #2: Treatment Units). Such catastrophic wildfires threaten human life, damage or destroy private property, damage or destroy major power corridor between Page, AZ and Las Vegas NV, and impact wildlife habitat, particularly critical mule

deer winter range and historic greater sage grouse habitat. High temperature wildfires also destroy vegetative cover and damage soil crusts, increasing the potential for soil erosion and invasion of cheat grass and other undesirable plant species. This treatment, as proposed, would also create fuel (fire) breaks to ensure that future wild fire suppression activities would be less dangerous for firefighters and more cost-effective.

Catastrophic wildfires in the project area could not only put human life and private property at risk, but also threaten public utilities and public highways. In addition, smoke from large wild fires in this area could also reduce visibility in Bryce Canyon, Grand Canyon and Zion National Parks.

Over the past 40 years, the pinyon pine and Utah juniper have gradually returned to dominate the project area. This project has been designed in cooperation with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) and local Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife Chapter. The mosaic pattern of treatments would enhance greater sage grouse habitat, improve forage conditions for big game species, retain thermal / escape cover for wintering big game herds (specifically mule deer), and provide effective fuel breaks allowing for the safe, more effective suppression of wildfires.

PLAN CONFORMANCE.

The public lands of the project area are managed according to objectives and decisions contained in the *Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision, November 1999*. Specifically, these fuels reduction treatments would be consistent with Wildlife Management Decision #1, 3 and 5 (pg 12), which states that the BLM will manage habitats for recovery of native populations; work with UDWR to meet goals in adopted species management plans; and preserve the integrity of wildlife corridors, migration routes and access to key forage areas.

The proposed action is also consistent with FP-1 (pg 28) and REV-1 (pg 30-31). FP-1 states that fuelwood harvesting, post cutting, ... will be allowed by permit only within designated areas. ... Commercial fuelwood cutting will be limited and authorized in designated areas only. The project area is within the already established Buckskin Mountain Forestry Products area. The Plan states that "Restoration is the process of returning disturbed areas to a natural array of native plant and animal associations." (pg 30). REV-1 emphasizes that restoration will be the goal whenever possible and native plants will be used as a priority.

The proposed action is also consistent with the BLM's Final Environmental Impact Statement: Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States, July 1991.

The proposed action is also consistent with the Utah *Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management* (1997), which address not only public rangeland health, but also watershed conditions, water quality, and habitat enhancements for wildlife and special status species.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REFERENCE

The action described above generally does not require the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), as it has been found to not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. The proposed action is categorically excluded from further analysis or documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with:

- 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, 1.12. Hazardous fuels reduction activities using ... mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing, not to exceed 1,000 acres.
- 516 DM 11.5 Category C.2. The application of this categorical exclusion for the sale and removal of individual trees or small groups of trees which are dead, diseased, injured, or which constitute a safety hazard, and where access for the removal requires no more than maintenance to existing roads.

The application of these categorical exclusions are appropriate as there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action would not create adverse environmental effects or trigger an exception.

EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION

The action has been reviewed to determine if any of the below listed exceptions to categorical exclusion documentation apply.

Would the project:

<i>Exceptions</i>	Yes	No
1. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		X
Rationale: The methods proposed to be used would keep impacts to a minimum and would not impair public health or safety. It is located in an area little frequented by the public. The contractor will be required to abide by all applicable OSHA standards and guidelines. Once treatments are completed, fuel levels in the area should be reduced and decrease the intensity of any wildfire that should start in the area, and reduce the probability of wildfire damage to the power corridor between Page, AZ and Las Vegas NV.		
2. Have adverse effects on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild and scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; and other ecologically significant or critical areas?		X
Rationale: Resources are present, but no adverse effects identified. Cultural resources may be present in the area. Section 106 compliance inventory will be completed prior to project implementation. Any cultural sites found will be protected by avoidance. Recreational use is light in the project area. Treatment areas are small in comparison to the surrounding area, and any recreational displacement is easily absorbed by similar surrounding lands. No other listed resources would be potentially impacted		
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102 (2) (E)]?		X
Rationale: The effects from the proposed treatments would not have highly controversial effects or involve unresolved conflicts. This has been demonstrated in similar projects that have been implemented and monitored.		
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?		X
Rationale: Impacts of the proposed action are insignificant as demonstrated by similar projects that have been implemented and monitored. Similar fuels reduction projects have been conducted in the Cedar City area (Greenville Bench Enhancement Project, Woolsey/Vandenberg Fuels Reduction Project, South Canyon Fuels Reduction Project, Joel Spring Fuels Reduction, Ash Creek Fuels Reduction, Brookside Fuels Reduction).		
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principal about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?		X
Rationale: This proposed project is not connected to another action that would require further environmental analysis nor would it set a precedent for future actions requiring environmental analysis.		
6. Be directly related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?		X

<p>Rationale: This action is not directly related to any other actions, nor does it contribute substantially to cumulatively significant environmental effects. The Ford Pasture fuels reduction project is located in the western portion of the Monument (approx. 20 miles to the northwest of this proposed project) but will not contribute to significant cumulative environmental effects due to geographic distance.</p>		
7. Have adverse effects on properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places?		X
<p>Rationale: No properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are contained within the project area. As this project is proposed, there would be no adverse effects on properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places.</p>		
8. Have adverse effects on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
<p>Rationale: There are no known Federally listed or proposed wildlife or plant species, or critical habitat in the project area.</p>		
9. Have the potential to violate a Federal law, or a state, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?		X
<p>Rationale: No laws would be violated by the proposed project.</p>		
10. Have the potential for a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898)?		X
<p>Rationale: The GSENM is located in a remote and unpopulated region of Utah, and as such there is an insignificant possibility of disproportional impacts on minority or low income populations as a result of this action.</p>		
11. Restrict access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners or adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007)?		X
<p>Rationale: There are no known Indian sacred sites in the project area. Tribes were contacted about the project. No comments or issues were brought to the project. Tribes contacted included the Navajo Nation (Cameron, Kaibeto, Olijato, Lechee, Navajo Mountain, and Window Rock Chapters), Kaibab-Paiute Tribe, Ute Tribe, San Juan Southern Paiute, Hopi (Kykotsmovi), Pueblo of Zuni, and the Paiute Tribes of Utah (Cedar City) (See project record document no. 4).</p>		
12. Significantly contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weeds Control Act and Executive Order 13112)?		X
<p>Rationale: There are no known noxious weeds or non-native invasive species in the project area. All equipment and materials will be cleaned of weed seed prior to moving to the project site for treatment. Monitoring of the site would continue and any noxious or non-native invasive species which establish would be controlled in an appropriate manner and in conformance with the Monument Management Plan.</p>		

Land Use Plan conformance and Categorical Exclusion review confirmation:Lead Preparer: /s/ Melissa S. Siders Date: 7/1/05Environmental Coordinator: /s/ Rusty Lee Date: 7/5/05**PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED**

The following Federal and State agency personnel contributed to the development of this project:

- Tyler Thompson: Habitat Biologist (Southern Region), Utah Department of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
- Adam Bronson: Wildlife Biologist (Southern Region), Utah Department of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
- Holly Beck : Botanist, BLM, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
- Doug Page: Forester, BLM, Cedar City Field Office
- Steve Small: Wildlife Biologist, BLM, Cedar City Field Office

Members of the public, including adjoining land owners, were made aware of this project by following method:

1. Posting of the Categorical Exclusion Screening Form and Decision Memorandum on BLM's statewide web-site, the Electronic NEPA Notification Board
2. Outreach / scoping letters mailed to adjacent landowners and grazing permittees, and interested parties.
3. Field tours with local Sportsman for Fish and Wildlife Chapter board members and UDWR employees.
4. Field tours with parties interested in Stewardship Contracting projects.

APPROVAL AND DECISION

I have decided to implement the Buckskin Mountain Fuels Reduction project as described in the proposed action. These actions meet the need for action. In addition, I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan and that no further environmental analysis is required.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project is expected to be initiated in Fiscal Year 2006, as staffing and funding permit.

Monument Manager: /s/ Dave Hunsaker Date: 7/5/05**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OPPORTUNITY**

Parties may appeal for administrative review in accordance with the following procedures.

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4. If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above, within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

Request for Stay

Should you wish to file a petition, pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21, for stay (suspension) of the effectiveness of this decision pending the outcome of an appeal, the petition for stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Copies of the notice of appeal

and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted. A petition for stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this project, contact Melissa Siders, Wildlife Biologist, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, BLM, Kanab, UT or telephone: 435-644-4338.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1. Proposed Action Treatment Specifications**
- 2. Project Vicinity Map**
- 3. Project Treatment Unit Map**
- 4. Thinning Guidelines for Pinyon and Juniper Trees**